

Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

Beginner Backpacking Hike to Horsepound Falls

By Fran Wallas

A hike to Horsepound Falls at the South Cumberland Recreation Area near Monteagle is an adventure rewarded by two waterfalls, an overlook, and a wonderful variety of wildflowers.

You can hike the trail in a day, but you will enjoy it more if you spend the night at West Collins Campground.

West Collins is one of the best beginner backpacking hikes. You reach the campsite in less than a half-mile, but you feel like you are out in the middle of a wilderness. You can drop your pack, set up your tent, and fill up water containers at the spring. If you have forgotten anything essential in the car, you can go back for the needed item. You can even carry in a cooler. Remember, though, that there are no alcoholic beverages allowed in Tennessee State Parks.

Now that you have settled in, you can grab a fanny pack with water and food to start your hike. The trails are well marked with white blazes. Although the campsite is very easy to reach, the hikes are rated moderately strenuous. Some new to hiking may want to rest and enjoy the Rocky Point Overlook at the campground. Other hikers wanting a short hike will choose to go to Suter Falls less than a half-mile from the campground. The trail leads to a beautiful rock bluff overhang beside the triple drop waterfall. The area is a wonderful place to picnic. Pick a boulder and dangle your feet in the water.

If you want a longer hike, you can wade across Rocky Mountain Creek below the falls and continue on toward Horsepound Falls. The hike to Horsepound Falls is one of the best spring wildflower hikes. When you start winding down towards the Collins River, you will begin to notice the spring flowers. Each week the flowers get better. There are waves of white early spring flowers such as toothwort, chickweed, Spring Beauty and hepatica. The next week you might see the mostly yellow colors of Trout Lily, Dutchman's Breeches and trillium. Later in the spring you will enjoy the purples of Fringed Phacelia.

After you descend to the lower part of the trail, you will have a choice of quiet places by the Collins River. The spur trail to Horsepound Falls is clearly marked and blazed in blue. Horsepound Falls is a good snack or lunch spot with lots of large flat rocks to sit on. If you decide to go less than a half a mile further, you can see Fall Creek cascade down the mountain and completely disappear into a sinkhole.

In order to get back to the Collins West Campground, you need to retrace your hike. You will notice that the hike back is uphill all the way to the campground. You will be ready to rest at camp and watch the sunset from the overlook.

Below: The Collins River in South Cumberland State Recreation Area near Monteagle. **Above:** Horsepound Falls in South Cumberland State Recreation Area near Monteagle.



Terry Bonham

Directions

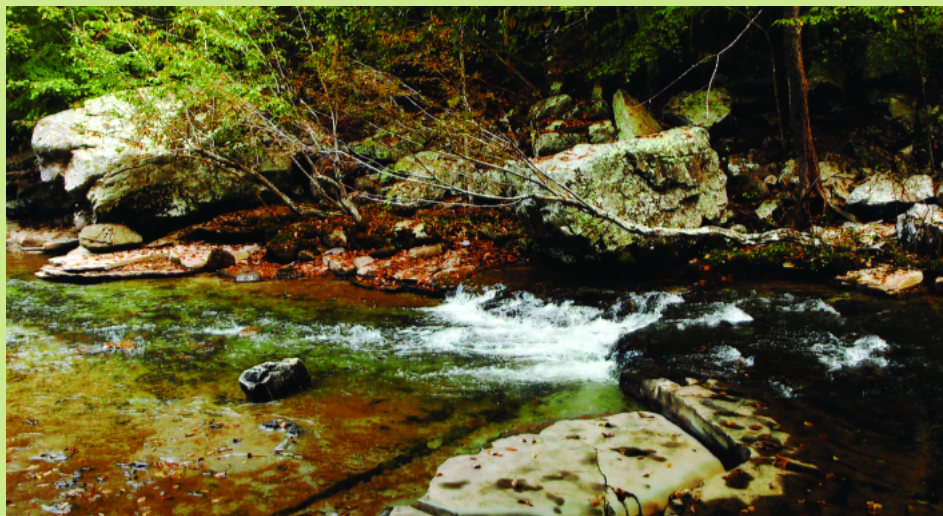
Finding the trail is part of the fun. Take highway 24 to the Pelham/Winchester exit 127. Follow highway 50 east toward Altamont for about 11 miles as you wind up to the top of the Cumberland Plateau. Make a right turn on highway 108 South and go about 10 miles to the community of Gruetli-Laager. Gruetli and Laager were two communities settled by the Swiss in the 1860s and the city of Gruetli-Laager was formed in 1980, when the two communities joined together. You will notice a grocery store just in case you need some extra goodies for your backpacking trip. You will also notice a dairy bar for an emergency ice cream stop.

After about another mile, you will see a brown sign for "Savage Gulf State Natural Area-Collins Gulf Access" with an arrow pointing to a left turn onto 55th Avenue. Go straight on 55th Avenue for about two miles to the trailhead parking lot. There is a kiosk with trail maps and a place to register for your free campsite. As you face the kiosk, you will see a metal gate to your left at the entrance to the trail.

Horsepound Falls



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville.)



Terry Bonham